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LUG IN VITAL SCIENCES FEARED

Sputniks Put U. S. Schools on the Spot

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Three months ago yesterday the Soviet Union surprised the world by launching the United States in putting an artificial satellite into space. That feat of science and technology both impressed and frightened Americans. Concern that the United States was falling behind the Communists in vital sciences provoked an outburst of criticism of the American educational system, in particular the high schools.

This article begins a series by Times-Dispatch staff writers on what the Soviet educational challenge means to the mid-area schools.

The writer of this article is a specialist in Soviet affairs who joined The Times-Dispatch as a copy editor in 1946. He speaks Russian and did graduate work at the Soviet Institute in Denmark.

By Raymond H. Anderson

The post-sputnik criticism of American schools for lagging behind the Communists in scientific education is a variation on an old complaint.

For more than 50 years public schools in the United States have been criticized for failure to give their students as good a basic education as schools in Europe. The criticism was printed mostly in educational journals and seldom caught the attention of the general public.

A few years ago Soviet achievements in nuclear weapons and jet aircraft did cause brief public discussion of the suf-

ficiency of American education in an age of scientific and military competition. But interest in the school problem soon died out.

Then on October 4 the Soviet Union shot Sputnik I 200 miles into space and sent it orbiting around the earth at 18,000 mph.

Americans looked into the twilight sky to see Sputnik or its rocket flash overhead like comets or meteors, an excitement and wonderment settled over the land.

SPUTNIK—a tangible symbol of the Communist drive for world supremacy—aroused Americans possibly more than anything since Pearl Harbor.

Worried citizens wanted to know what had made it possible for Soviet Russia, a nation that only a few decades ago was 75 per cent illiterate, to outstrip the United States in the complex techniques necessary to invade space.

Many answers were given but one stood out above the rest—science education. Its priority in the Soviet Union and its decline in the United States.

Critics of American schools charged that during the years the Russians were developing a highly competitive school system with emphasis on the fundamentals of mathematics, sciences and languages, the United States was permitting its public schools to relax academic requirements in favor of vague objectives such as "life adjustment" and "personality development."

At first the primary potential advantage

and the needs, die on the vine and in the United States because of the "space preparation" in high schools. Critics predicted even more serious scientific defeats unless schools were quickly improved.

Dr. Herbert Scoville Jr., assistant director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said in October that the Soviet Union already has 1,500,000 scientists and technologists as against 300,000 in the United States. But even of more concern, Dr. Scoville said, is the fact that Soviet universities now are graduating twice as many each year as American schools.

In 1954, three years before the Sputnik, Dr. John Latimer, professor of Latin and Greek at George Washington University, made a survey of high schools in the United States. His findings showed a steady and sharp decline in nearly all schools of the "most important" courses of mathematics, sciences and languages.

Nine months before Sputnik, Dr. Arthur Bestor, professor of history at the University of Illinois, was a leading critic of public schools. He said that in the year 1956 there were 1,500 American high schools which had reduced the number of courses in mathematics and sciences, or dropped them altogether.

After Sputnik II had been launched in November, Marion B. Folsom, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, summed up the consequences of the